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THE RESTORATION OF PALESTINE TO THE JEWS AND THE DOCTRINE OF PROPHETIC INSPIRATION

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It was reported that during his campaign in Palestine General Allenby had spent at least one whole night, along with another scholar, studying the Bible for the purpose of gaining greater light upon the Hebrew people. The result of that burning of the all-night oil was not stated. But a very important question is thereby suggested: Did they come to the conclusion that the Old Testament was to be taken literally in its many prophetic statements that Jerusalem was to become the center of political and military world-domination?

Among such passages may be mentioned the following: Isa. 2:2-4, Jerusalem the center of world-worship of Jehovah, the source of "law and the word of Jehovah," thus insuring, by a Hebrew imperialism, the beating of "swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks"; Isa., chap. 11, the reign of the ideal David, who shall stand "for an ensign of the peoples, unto whom shall the nations seek; and his resting place shall be glorious" (see 14:32; 24:21-23; 42:1-9); Isa., chap. 40, the power of Jehovah, the only God, exerted in behalf of Zion, and his exaltation among the nations (chaps. 41, 43, 44, 45, 60); Isa., chap. 49, Jehovah for Israel and Israel triumphant against odds. (The exiles shall return from distant lands. "The children of thy bereavement shall

yet say in thine ears, The place is too strait for me; give place to me that I may dwell. . . . And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their faces to the earth and lick the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am Jehovah, and they that wait for me shall not be put to shame.")

Numerous passages indicate Jehovah's exaltation among the Gentiles, not only such as are found in the latter part of Isaiah, but some also in the Psalms (see Pss. 22:27, 28; 68:29, 31-35). Mal. 1:11, 14 may be cited to the same effect. Some of these passages are highly ethical and spiritual in their import, such as Isa., chaps. 53 and 55; yet they indicate the exaltation and supremacy of Israel. Psalm 2 is characteristic of this supremacy, while Ps. 72 sings the praises of Jehovah's king and the homage that shall be rendered him, for "his name shall endure forever, his name shall be continued as long as the sun, and men shall be blessed in him, all nations shall call him happy." All this is based on the wonders wrought by Jehovah in Israel's past history as traditional belief had brought it down from the birth of the Hebrew people. Isaiah, chap. 51, begins in that strain. Psalm 78 weaves together Israel's miracu-

lous history and her rebellion against Jehovah, and closes with the triumph of the sanctuary on Mount Zion and the Davidic reign. A late view, probably arising by comparison with the heathen worship of the heavens, reveals Jehovah's power by virtue of his creation of the heavenly worlds (see Isa. 40:26; 42:5; 45:18). Out of this view of Jehovah's exaltation and power grew the prophetic absolute confidence in the triumph of Israel as a nation.

Now if such passages are to be interpreted literally—as God's irrevocable revelation of the future, coming to pass by virtue of divine inspiration, suspended in the execution until the present—then there is grave danger to the future peace of the world lurking behind our traditional doctrine of the divine source of the Scriptures. For the will of God, if indeed he has promulgated one on such matters, in such a manner and to such an end, is final, and no manipulation of political events by men can ultimately stay his hand. Unfortunately this doctrine is held not alone by many present-day Christians but is also part of the religious beliefs of many Jews, through whom it has come down from ancient times and from whom it was inherited by the early Christian church.

Are the Jews to return in large numbers to Palestine? Such is the purpose of the Zionist movement. Are they to build a greater Jerusalem and finally control the world by force of arms, even through the beneficence of Jehovah's law and the glory of his worship? Are there enough Jews in the world who seriously believe this and who may be relied upon to help carry it into execution? Then, although this plan may

appear too far distant for the present generation to give it serious consideration, a Jewish outbreak at some future date is almost inevitable.

Or, is there no danger whatsoever of a future Jewish uprising, with certain leaders in control at Jerusalem? Let us not be deceived, so long as the traditional doctrine of final Jewish control of the world is held. So the rest of the world quite felt its safety as "one that nods and winks behind a slowly dying fire" of preparedness when the "hungry people" (for conquest) of Germany suddenly sprang upon them. And the Germans claimed to be the chosen people of Jehovah, bent upon world-dominion in the name of the Lord.

Several views may be taken of the situation as indicated above. Among them are:

1. That prophecy indicates that the glory of the Hebrew reign and the world-supremacy of Jerusalem are yet in the future. Not only the orthodox Jews believe this, but many Christians take this view of the literal interpretation of prophecy. This view holds that Jews in large numbers are to return to Jerusalem and that in some miraculous manner God is to assist them in the re-establishment of their nationality and in the conquest of the world. (Christians who hold to the return of the Jews interpose the second coming of Christ and his rulership of the world.) If enough orthodox Jews could be held to this position, then there is another world-war coming. To such Jews the present seems to be "the set time" "to favor Zion" (Ps. 102:13), and they look for the renewal of the Jewish nation in Palestine at the hands of the Allies and

the United States. This position is based upon doctrines of biblical inspiration and revelation as now held by many Jews and Christians and still taught in some theological schools and preached from many pulpits.

We may make indictments against this literal mode of interpretation as follows: First, those Christians who believe in the doctrine of literal interpretation of the Scriptures cannot adjust the New Testament to the Old on this point. Matthew, chaps. 24, 25, which are held by the literalists to be prophetic, do not contain any hint of the restoration of Jerusalem, but rather suggest its destruction, precedent to the Parousia (see 24:29-31; add to this 23:37, 38). The same is true of the parallel apocalypses of Mark, chap. 13, and of Luke, chap. 21. Paul believed not in an earthly restoration but in destruction, after matters had gone from bad to worse, as an accompaniment of the second coming of Christ; there is not even any room in his epistles for a millennium. In the Book of Revelation the destruction of the apocalyptic Babylon—whether Rome or Jerusalem—is preceded by the battle of Armageddon (16:16), which leads to the Christian millennium (chap. 20), after which, in a brief space of time, the devil and his cohorts are miraculously destroyed as they “compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city,” all of which dissolves to give place to the new Jerusalem, which is an eternal city for the immortals and not a restored earthly Jerusalem, ruler of the world. There is here no prophecy that can at all be compared to the Old Testament prophetic ideal, earthly Jerusalem. The incon-

sistency is obvious and with literalistic basis could only be accounted for upon the ground that God had changed his mind, which, by the assumption of his nature and character, is an absurdity.

Secondly, the Old Testament utterances on the supremacy of Jerusalem are accompanied by too much that is human to warrant accepting them as revelations from God in the literalistic sense. The reference could not be to the distant future, for the idolatrous systems of Israel's neighbors furnish the background of many of them, and it cannot be a fair principle of interpretation to extract these as local and temporal and leave the balance intact as predictive of other times and conditions.

Thirdly, the Miraculous Prodigies enter too largely into the prophetic picture to warrant a literal interpretation. God does not so intervene either in nature or human history. The concept was fine enough in its day; it was full of that spirit of hope by which the world was saved from the baleful influence of its own pessimism. But a scientific age cannot believe in the will of God disturbing his orderly ways in life by a process which, of its own statement, is very mechanical. Like the doctrine of the second coming of Christ in visible form to rule the world, it involves too great, too sudden, and too mechanical a change in human nature.

2. A second view may be taken that the doctrine of inspiration recognizes the limitations of the human agency, while yet holding to the divine revelation of the essential truth.

This seeks to preserve the idea of revelation from God as authority for

what is outstanding in Judaism and Christianity. Certain facts and events must be held, it is assumed, as pre-determined by God as centers around which spiritual life may gather, and the Holy Spirit really moved the prophets in their look into the future.

The objection to this view is largely involved in the foregoing. To this may be added the difficulties of separating the essential from the nonessential. One person might satisfy himself as to what was the work of the Spirit and what was the mere utterance of the prophet. Another person might not thus rightly divide the word of truth. Such differences of opinion exist between schools of interpretation at the present time.

This view need not hold to the supremacy of Jerusalem. The prophecies may be interpreted as fulfilled in the fact of Christian spirituality arising in Palestine and taking its spread from Jerusalem to "the uttermost parts of the earth."

3. The view may be held that the prophetic inspiration was human, though rising into the atmosphere of spiritual truth and there partaking partially of what is eternally true with God. The various activities of man's psychical nature are sufficient to lead him to apprehension of God, beginning on a low plane, as history clearly declares, and rising to a comprehension of things divine by varying degrees until the best Christian concepts of today are held. This does not rule out the providence

of God, but it rightly calls attention to the human agency in the process of revelation. Prophetic activities are to be seen in such mystic experiences as recorded of Isaiah's call (chap. 6) and that of Ezekiel (chaps. 1 and 2). The process was one of objectifying what was subjective in prophetic experience, leaving the objective concept to be rectified by the fuller psychical development and critical processes of the modern scientific era.

From this point of view the prophetic utterances concerning the glory and the supremacy of Jerusalem are to be taken as patriotic poems, noble in their concepts and racial feelings, but not bearing with them any eventual truth. Speaking at the Sinai temple, Chicago, Dr. Jastrow, of the University of Pennsylvania, declared, "The modern concept of Zionism is based largely on literal belief of biblical prophecies and upon sentiment. There is today no real Jewish nation, and we Jews may as well reconcile ourselves to that fact. The orthodox Jew still believes his people will inhabit Zion, prays for it and hopes for it—but it is sheer sentiment, devoid of practical application."

We cannot ask the Jew to cease to be patriotic, but we may insist upon his contribution to the common thought and welfare of humanity. And even more may we insist that the present return of a group of Jews to Jerusalem is utterly unrelated to any physical coming of Jesus to establish a world-empire with Jerusalem as its center.